

## פרקי אבות - פרק א'

Moses received Torah from Mount Sinai and passed it on to Joshua. And Joshua (passed it) to the Elders, and the Elders to the Prophets, and the Prophets passed it on to the Men of the Great Assembly. They said three things: be deliberate in judgment, raise many students, and make a fence around the Torah.

א מֹשֶׁה קִבֵּל תּוֹרָה מִסִּינַי, וּמָסָרָהּ  
לְיִהוֹשֻׁעַ, וְיִהוֹשֻׁעַ לְזִקְנִים, וְזִקְנִים  
לְנָבִיאִים, וְנָבִיאִים מִסְרֻהָ לְאַנְשֵׁי כְנֶסֶת  
הַגְּדוֹלָה. הֵם אָמְרוּ שְׁלֹשָׁה דְבָרִים, הָיוּ  
מְתוּנִים בְּדִין, וְהִעֲמִידוּ תַלְמִידִים הֶרְבֵּה,  
וַעֲשׂוּ סָיֵג לַתּוֹרָה:

The Men of the Great Assembly was a group of prophets and sages assembled by Ezra the Scribe (there is a book named for him in the **כתובים** of the **תנ"ך**). The Talmud tells us that there was a total of 120 men in the Great Assembly. It served as the leadership of the Jewish people after the return from the Babylonian exile (approximately 333 C.E.) **שמעון הצדיק** was the last member of the Great Assembly (see next mishna).

1) Why does the mishna teach about who received Torah?

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2) What “Torah” is the mishna talking about, the *humash* or something else/something more?

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3) To whom did the Men of the Great Assembly pass the Torah tradition?

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4) Make a list: Who received Torah during all the years between the Men of the Great Assembly and us?

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_____	_____
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ב שְׁמֵעוֹן הַצַּדִּיק הָיָה מְשִׁירֵי כְּנָסֶת  
הַגְּדוּלָּה. הוּא הָיָה אוֹמֵר, עַל שְׁלֹשָׁה  
דְּבָרִים הָעוֹלָם עוֹמֵד,  
עַל הַתּוֹרָה  
וְעַל הָעֲבוּדָה  
וְעַל גְּמִילוּת חַסְדִּים:

Simon the Righteous was the final member of  
the Great Assembly. He used to say: the  
world rests upon three things:  
upon Torah,  
upon work (this word also means “worship” to the Rabbis),  
and upon acts of loving-kindness.

What are the three things upon which you think the world depends? YOUR three things.



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Antignos, a man from Sokho received the tradition from Simon the Righteous. He used to say : do not be like the servants who serve the master on the condition of receiving a reward. Rather, be like servants who serve the master not on the condition of receiving a reward; and let the awesomeness of heaven be upon you.

ג אַנטִיגֶנוֹס אִישׁ סוֹכוֹ קִבֵּל מִשְׁמֵעוֹן הַצַּדִּיק. הוּא הָיָה אוֹמֵר, אַל תְּהִי כְעֹבְדִים הַמְשִׁמְשִׁין אֶת הָרֵב עַל מְנַת לְקַבֵּל פָּרָם, אֲלָא הָיוּ כְעֹבְדִים הַמְשִׁמְשִׁין אֶת הָרֵב שְׂלֹא עַל מְנַת לְקַבֵּל פָּרָם, וַיְהִי מוֹרָא שָׁמַיִם עֲלֵיהֶם:

1) How many times does the word “receive” appear in the CHAPTER? Why does it appear so often?

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2) Even if you are not studying Torah for the sake of receiving a reward, is there a reward for studying Torah?

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3) What does it mean to have the “awe of heaven” upon you? How would/should it affect your behavior?

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4) How is this teaching related to the **על שלשה דברים** teaching?

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## פרקי אבות - פרק א'

Yosi ben Yo'ezer, a man from the town of Tz'reida, and Yosi ben Yohanan from Yerushalayim received the tradition from them. Yosi ben Yo'ezer from Tz'reida says: let your house be a meeting place for the Sages; let yourself sit at the dust of their feet; and let yourself thirstily drink up their teachings.

ד יוסי בן יועזר איש צרדה ויוסי בן יוחנן איש ירושלים קבלו מהם. יוסי בן יועזר איש צרדה אומר, יהי ביתך בית ועד לחכמים, והוי מתאפק בפער רגליהם, והוי שותה בצמא את דברייהם:

1) How many recommendations does this mishna make and how would you summarize what the group of them intends to mean?

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2) Look at the structure of the text of the next several mishnayot. What do they have in common with this one?

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3) Why is it important to stay near to the Sages and to listen to them?

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4) This mishna tells us to sit at the feet of the Sages. Sitting at the feet of another is a sign of what kind of relationship and feeling?

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5) How is this teaching an explanation of part of the **על שלשה דברים** teaching?

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## פרקי אבות - פרק א'

Yosi ben Yohanan from Yerushalayim says: Let your house be open to the public street; let the poor be members of your household; and do not make too much conversation with women (with regard to a man's own wife did he say this, all the more so when it comes to another man's wife). From here the Sages said: each time that a man makes too much conversation with a woman, he causes bad things for himself and cancels out the words of the Torah; and his end will be the inheritance of *Geihinom*.

ה יוסי בן יוחנן איש ירושלים אומר, יהי ביתך פתוח לרחוקה, ויהיו עניים בני ביתך, ואל תרבה שיחה עם האשה. באשתו אמרו, קל וחמר באשת חברו. מבאן אמרו חכמים, כל זמן שאדם מרבה שיחה עם האשה, גורם רעה לעצמו, ובוטל מדברי תורה, וסופו יורש גיהנום:

1) How is this teaching an explanation of part of the **על שלשה דברים** teaching?

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2) How can we fulfill the advice of this **משנה** today? Can you?

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3) What is the perception of women in this **משנה**? How do you think women felt during this time? How is our society different from the rabbinic period in terms of women? Does our society maintain the perceptions of the time from long ago? Even if we may not agree with what this **משנה** says seems to say about women, why must we still study it?

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## פרקי אבות - פרק א'

Yehoshu'a ben P'rah'ya and Nitai the Arbelite received the tradition from them. Yehoshu'a ben P'rah'ya says: Make for yourself a Rabbi, and acquire a friend; and give each person the benefit of the doubt.

ו יְהוֹשֻעַ בֶּן פְּרַחְיָה וְנִתַּאי הָאֲרֵבִלִי קִבְּלוּ  
מֵהֶם. יְהוֹשֻעַ בֶּן פְּרַחְיָה אָמַר, עֲשֵׂה לְךָ  
רֵב, וּקְנֵה לְךָ חֵבֵר, וְהָיוּ דִן אֶת כָּל  
הָאָדָם לְכַף זְכוּת:

1) What does this mishna teach about the relationship between students and teachers?

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2) Have you ever had a teacher that brought this teaching to life for you? What was special/different about that teacher? Did you treat his/her class any different because of your relationship?

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3) Should everyone be given the benefit of the doubt? What if they already have a reputation for poor behavior? Read the next mishna and see what Nitai the Arbelite says about this.

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4) From the first line of this mishna, what title would you give to the relationship between Yehoshua ben Prah'yah and Nitai the Arbelite?

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5) Do you think their relationship had anything to do with this teaching about teachers & friends? Explain.

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## פרקי אבות - פרק א'

Nitai the Arbelite says: keep your distance from bad neighbors; and do not make friends with evil people; and do not lose faith about punishment.

ז נתאי הארבל' אומר, הרחק משכן רע,  
ואל תתחבר לרשע, ואל תתיאש מן  
הפרענות:

1) So, what is Nitai the Arbelite's feeling about giving everyone the benefit of the doubt?

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2) In your opinion, how many chances should a person get? Can people change?

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Read the following text from *birkot hashahar*.

May it be Your will Lord our God and God of our ancestors that we will become accustomed to your Torah and cling to its commandments. Do not bring us to sin, transgression, and error. Do not bring us to trial or disgrace. Let not our evil impulses have control over us. Keep us far away from wicked people and companions. Have us cling to the motivation to do good and to acts of loving kindness. Drive our impulses to serve you.

ויהי רצון מלפניך, ה' א-להינו וא-להי  
אבותינו שתרגילנו בתורתך, ודבקנו  
במצותיך, ואל תביאנו לא לידי חטא, ולא  
לידי עברה ועון, ולא לידי נסיון, ולא לידי  
בזיון, ואל תשלט בנו יצר הרע. והרחיקנו  
מאדם רע ומחבר רע. ודבקנו ביצר הטוב  
ובמעשים טובים, וכוף את יצרנו  
להשתעבד לך.

3) Compare the message from this text to the message of the mishna. What similarities do you find?

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4) Why do you think the morning service begins with this text...almost right at the beginning?

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## פרקי אבות - פרק א'

Yehuda ben Tabai and Shimon ben Shetah received (Torah) from them. Yehuda ben Tabai says: Do not make yourselves like lawyers. When litigants are in front of you, they should be in your eyes as wicked people. When they are dismissed from before you, they should be in your eyes as innocent people when they accept your ruling.

ח יהודה בן טבאי ושמעון בן שטח קבלו מהם. יהודה בן טבאי אומר, אל תעש עצמך כעורכי דינין. וכשיהיו בפני דין עומדים לפניך, יהיו בעיניך כרשעים. וכשנפטרים מלפניך, יהיו בעיניך כזכאים. כשקבלו עליהם את הדין:

1) To whom is this teaching being directed? What role did Rabbis used to play in independent Jewish society? How does this mishna give them direction?

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2) What is the difference between judges and lawyers and how they approach a court case?

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3) When litigants come to court in Canada, are they seen as innocent or guilty? What is the famous saying about this that we should all know well? Is this different from our mishna here? Which approach do you think is better and why?

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4) Compare this mishna to what mishna 6 says about how to judge people. What did you find and how do you explain the difference?

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Shimon ben Shetah says: Extensively investigate witnesses and be very careful with your words, in case they will learn to lie from them.

ט שמעון בן שטח אומר, תהי מרבה לחקור את העדים, ותהי זהיר בדבריך. שפא מתוכם ילמדו לשקר:



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Sh'maya and Avtalyon received (Torah) from them. Shmaya says: Love work and hate being a master; do not become known to the public government.

י שְׁמַעְיָה וְאַבְטַלְיוֹן קִבְּלוּ מֵהֶם. שְׁמַעְיָה  
אָמַר, אֲהוּב אֶת הַמְּלָאכָה, וּשְׂנֵא אֶת  
הַרְבֵּנוּת, וְאַל תִּתְּיָדַע לְרִשּׁוֹת:

Avtalyon says: Sages - be careful with your words, in case you become obligated for the penalty of exile and are expelled to a place with evil water. The students who follow after you may drink and die, which will lead the Name of Heaven to be desecrated.

יֵא אַבְטַלְיוֹן אָמַר, הִכְמִים, הוֹדְרוּ  
בְּדַבְרֵיכֶם, שְׁמָא תַּחֲבוּ חוֹבַת גְּלוּת  
וְתִגְלוּ לְמָקוֹם מִיַּם הָרָעִים, וְיִשְׁתּוּ  
הַתְּלִמִּידִים הַבָּאִים אַחֲרֵיכֶם וְיָמוּתוּ.  
וְנִמְצָא שֵׁם שָׁמַיִם מְתַחֲלָל:

- 1) Looking back from this mishna to mishna 8, what title would you give to these 5 mishnayot?  
(Your answer to question 1 after that mishna might help you)

Hillel and Shammai received (Torah) from them. Hillel says: Be from among the students of Aaron, loving peace and pursuing peace, loving all people and bringing them close to Torah.

יב הִלֵּל וְשַׁמַּי קִבְּלוּ מֵהֶם. הִלֵּל אָמַר,  
הָיוּ מִתְּלִמִּדָיו שֶׁל אַהֲרֹן, אוֹהֵב שְׁלוֹם  
וְרוֹדֵף שְׁלוֹם, אוֹהֵב אֶת הַבְּרִיּוֹת וּמִקְרָבָן  
לַתּוֹרָה:

- 1) Remind yourself of the following details about Hillel and Shammai: for what they were known. When did they live? Did either of them have a special job? What were their approaches to the law, teaching, and making decisions? Who won most of their arguments?

- 2) Why do you think Hillel's first teaching in the Mishna is about peace?

- 3) Read the following story (which you may or may not have heard before);  
The Talmud relates (BT Shabbat 31):

“A non-Jew once came to convert to Judaism, on the condition that he could learn the whole Torah while standing on one foot. He approached Shammai, who rejected him. So he went to

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Hillel and asked him that he wanted to be taught the Torah while standing on one foot. Hillel told him: “That which you hate, do not do to your neighbor. That is the whole Torah, and everything else is commentary—go and learn!”

Another non-Jew who wanted only the written Torah came to convert. Shammai refused him, so he went to Hillel. The first day, Hillel taught him the Hebrew alphabet. However, the next day Hillel reversed the order of the letters. Confused, the convert asks, “But yesterday you said the opposite!?” Said Hillel: “Now you see that the written word alone is insufficient. We need the Oral Tradition in order to understand the Written.”

A third non-Jew was very impressed by the Priestly garments and came to convert. Again, Shammai dismissed him, but Hillel encouraged him to study more. After learning, he came to realize that even David, King of Israel, didn’t qualify to serve as a priest in the Temple, because he wasn’t born a Kohen.” The non-Jew came back to Hillel and said, ‘O gentle Hillel; blessings rest on thy head for bringing me under the wings of the Shekhinah!’ Some time later the three met in one place; said they, Shammai’s impatience sought to drive us from the world, but Hillel’s gentleness brought us under the wings of the Shekhinah (BT Shabbat 31a).

4) What is “The Golden Rule” as it is written in this story? Do you know how it is worded in the Torah? What is the difference?

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5) From this story, what can we learn about the differences in approach between Hillel and Shammai? Whose approach do you prefer and why?

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## פרקי אבות - פרק א'

He (Hillel) used to say: a person who seeks fame loses his name. A person who does not increase (Torah learning), decreases (it). A person who does not teach Torah is obligated the death penalty and a person who exploits the crown of Torah shall fade away.

יג הוא הָיָה אֹמֵר,  
נֶגַד שְׁמָא, אֶבֶד שְׁמֵהּ.  
וְדָלָא מוֹסִיף, יִסִּיף.  
וְדָלָא יִלִּיף, קִטְלָא חַיִּב.  
וְדֹאשְׁתַּמֵּשׁ בְּתַנָּא, חֵלְף:

1) What is “popularity?” What is this mishna saying about it? Why do some people see being popular as so important?

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2) What is this mishna saying about the importance of the “chain of transmission,” which we have discussed since the beginning of our learning in this chapter?

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3) If Hillel did not believe that someone deserved the death penalty for not being a teacher of Torah, then what point is he trying to make?

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4) This mishna talks about a person “losing his name” and “fading away.” Are these two descriptions related to one another? If so, how so? If not, how are they different?

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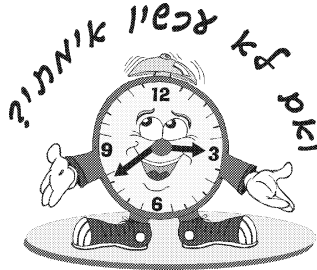
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## פרקי אבות - פרק א'

He (Hillel) used to say: If I am not for myself, who will be for me? If I am only for myself, what am I? And if not now, when?

יד הוא תִּיה אומר,  
אם אין אני לי, מי לי?  
ובְּשָׁאֲנִי לְעַצְמִי, מָה אֲנִי?  
וְאִם לֹא עַכְשָׁיו, אִמָּתַי?



1) What is Hillel teaching us about personal responsibility?

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2) What is Hillel saying about the universe of obligation?

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3) Look up the words “procrastination” and “initiative” and write down their definitions here. Does this mishna teach anything about them? If so, what is Hillel telling us?

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4) How are you succeeding or failing at living up to this mishna?

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## פרקי אבות - פרק א'

מִן שַׁמַּאי אוֹמֵר,

עֲשֵׂה תוֹרָתְךָ קָבַע.

אֲמֹר מְעַט וַעֲשֵׂה הַרְבֵּה,

וְהָיוּ מְקַבְּלִים אֶת כָּל הָאָדָם

בְּסִכָּר פָּנִים יְפוֹת:

Shammai says: Make your Torah study regularly scheduled. Say little, but do much. You should welcome each person with a warm face.

- 1) Each of Shammai's statements can stand by itself. Do you think you make Torah study a fixed practice? How? After you finish VTT, will you still be able to do so?

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- 2) What does it mean to you, to “say little but do much?” Do you know anyone who is a good example of this teaching?

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- 3) What does “welcoming each person with a warm face” mean to you? Why do you think it is so important that Shammai included it here? Is this an easy thing to do? After reading the story about the three potential converts to Judaism, do you think Shammai lived up to his own teaching?

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- 4) After reading teachings of Hillel and Shammai, whose teachings do you prefer and why?

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## פרקי אבות - פרק א'

Rabban Gamliel used to say: Make for yourself a teacher and separate yourself from uncertainty. Do not give too much for tithes (10% taxes on your produce) because of estimates.

מִזְרַבֵּן גַּמְלִיאֵל הָיָה אוֹמֵר,  
עֲשֵׂה לָךְ רַב,  
וְהִסְתֵּלֵק מִן הַסֵּפֶק,  
וְאַל תִּרְבֶּה לַעֲשׂוֹת אֲמָדוּת:

- 1) Look at your “Rabbi Timeline” and see what you find about the relationship between Hillel and Shammai and Rabban Gamliel. Find out a few details about Rabban Gamliel with some additional research.

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- 2) In mishna 6, we have already heard the advice to “Make yourself a Rabbi?” If that mishna was directed to students, to whom do you think this mishna is directed or how is this mishna different from that one (because the Mishna does not repeat itself)?

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- 3) What is similar between “uncertainty” and “estimating?” What are their opposites? How can uncertainty and estimating be helpful? How can precision and specificity be helpful?

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- 4) If this mishna is directed at Rabbi-Judges, why would it be important for them to avoid uncertainty and estimation?

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## פרקי אבות - פרק א'

Shim'on his son says: All of my days, I grew up among the Sages and I did not find anything better for me than silence. Action is the essence, not study. Anyone who talks too much brings on sin.

יֵשׁ שְׁמַעוֹן בְּנוֹ אוֹמֵר, כָּל יְמֵי גִדְלָתִי בֵּין  
הַחֲכָמִים, וְלֹא מָצָאתִי לְגוֹף טוֹב אֶלָּא  
שְׁתִּיקָה. וְלֹא הַמְדִּירֵשׁ הוּא הָעֵקֶר, אֶלָּא  
הַמַּעֲשֵׂה. וְכָל הַמְדַּבֵּר דְּבָרִים מְבִיא  
חַטָּא:

1) Read mishna 14 again. Do you think our R. Shim'on is a student of Shammai? Why or why not?

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2) Our studies have already taught us that Torah study is very important. However, why is this mishna teaching that **action** is the essence, not study?

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3) Do you think this mishna is right about too much talking? How does talking too much bring on problems and how can it be controlled? Do you ever suffer from this problematic behavior?

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Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel says: The world stands on three things: on justice, on truth and on peace, as it says in the Bible: "Truth and peaceful judgments will you judge within your gates." (Zekharyah ch. 8)

יְהִי רַבֵּן שְׁמַעוֹן בֶּן גַּמְלִיאֵל אוֹמֵר, עַל  
שְׁלֹשָׁה דְּבָרִים הָעוֹלָם עוֹמֵד, עַל הַדִּין  
וְעַל הָאֱמֶת וְעַל הַשְּׁלוֹם, שְׁנֵאָמַר (זְכַרְיָה  
ח) "אֱמֶת וּמִשְׁפָּט שְׁלוֹם שִׁפְטוּ  
בְּשַׁעְרֵיהֶם:"

## פרקי אבות - פרק א'

- 1) Compare this mishna to mishna 2. Compare and contrast the two sets of “three things” to each other. With which mishna do you agree more?

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- 2) Do you think there is a reason that mishna 2 “starts” the chapter and this mishna ends it? How does this later generation of Rabbis seem to be different from the generation that taught mishna 2 based on Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel’s teaching?

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- 3) What is the function of the verse from the Bible that is quoted in this mishna?

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- 4) Go back over the mishnayot of the chapter. If you had to choose one mishna from this chapter that you found the most meaningful, which one would it be and why? Write a good paragraph.

[illegible]